



Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Foundation Trust: Information for Families

Rituximab for chronic inflammatory conditions

The following information should be read in conjunction with the patient leaflet provided by the manufacturer. However, please note that this may differ from the manufacturer's information as we are specifically referring to the use of rituximab in children and young people.

This leaflet explains what rituximab is, how it is given and some of the possible side effects. Each person reacts differently to medicines, so your child will not necessarily suffer from every side effect mentioned. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

What is rituximab?

Rituximab (brand name MabThera®) is a relatively new medicine which works on the immune system. It removes some of the white blood cells in the body which are called B cells. Removing these stops the production of antibodies that may play a role in your child's illness.

Rituximab can help to treat children who may have one of the following:

- kidney transplants
- nephrotic syndrome
- vasculitis
- systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE)
- juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA)
- juvenile dermatomyositis (JDM)

Please see our information sheets for further details about these conditions.



Your child may have been given other medicines which affect the immune system such as steroids, azathioprine, mycophenolate mofetil, tacrolimus, ciclosporin, methotrexate, anti-TNF and cyclophosphamide. For some children these other medicines are not enough and for these children Rituximab can be a helpful treatment.

How is it given?

Your child will need to visit the ward to have rituximab because it is given slowly into a vein (also known as an intravenous infusion). Your doctor will decide on the number of doses you will need and the time between doses. It will usually be given twice with two weeks in between. Cyclophosphamide is sometimes given the day after the rituximab treatment. Some patients may require repeat rituximab treatments within a year or two. Blood pressure checks are performed by the nurses while the rituximab is given.



Who should not use rituximab?

Rituximab must not be given to patients who may be pregnant, are likely to become pregnant in the near future or are breastfeeding. If your daughter is ten years old or older, we will ask her about her periods and any possibility that she could be pregnant. Reliable contraception is advised for both male and female patients for twelve months after finishing rituximab.

What are the side effects?

Like all immune system medicines there is an increased risk of infection (especially viruses such as chicken pox, herpes or shingles). There is a risk of an allergic reaction at the time the medicine is given so all patients need to be given this medication in hospital. To reduce any allergic reaction, other medicines are given at the same time such as steroids, anti-histamines and paracetamol.

There have been some very rare reports of adults who have had rituximab, developing a virus infection in the brain. Research is ongoing and it is not clear whether this is due to rituximab itself or to other medicines that the patients have received. The virus infection of the brain is called progressive multifocal leucoencephalopathy and is caused by the JC virus (which is a polyomavirus).

Rituximab and other medicines

Always check with your doctor or pharmacist before giving your child any other medicine, including medicines on prescription from your family doctor (GP), medicines bought from a pharmacy (chemist) or any herbal or complementary medicines. However, no medicines have been reported as interacting with rituximab.

Useful numbers

GOSH switchboard
– 020 7405 9200

Pharmacy department
– 020 7829 8680

Pharmacy medicines information
– 020 7829 8608



Important information about rituximab

- **Chicken pox or tuberculosis** – If your child has not had chicken pox or tuberculosis and is in direct contact with a child who has it or develops it within 48 hours, you must contact the hospital immediately. Chicken pox and tuberculosis can be more severe in children who are taking rituximab. A blood test will be arranged to check your child's antibodies to chicken pox. Your child may need treatment to protect him or her. Your doctor or nurse will discuss this with you. If your child has chicken pox, it may be necessary to stop your child's medication for a short while. Your doctor will discuss this with you.
- **Immunisations** – As rituximab affects your child's immune system, children and young people taking these medicines should not be given any 'live' vaccines. However, children may be very ill if they catch one of the vaccine preventable diseases, so it is important that they are up to date with their vaccinations. Your other children should be immunised according to the usual schedule and although chicken pox vaccine is not routinely given to all children, it may be advisable for the siblings or other close family members of a child who is receiving rituximab. If you have any questions about immunisations, please ask your doctor.
- **Alert card** – We recommend that your child carries a biological therapy alert card at all times. This could be important if your child needs emergency treatment for any reason.

Notes

Compiled by the Nephrology and Pharmacy departments
in collaboration with the Child and Family Information Group

Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Foundation Trust
Great Ormond Street
London WC1N 3JH

www.gosh.nhs.uk

